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RR RUEHGR
DE RUEHBE #0073/01 0321746
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 011746Z FEB 07
FM AMEMBASSY BELMOPAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0211
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE
RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 0033

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BELMOPAN 000073

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DEPT FOR WHA/CEN (MACK)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [BH](#)

SUBJECT: ONE OF BELIZE'S THIRD POLITICAL PARTIES FIRST TO LAUNCH
GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

¶1. Summary: On January 17, the Vision Inspired by the People (VIP) political party officially launched its 2008 general elections campaign. Party Chairman Paul Morgan laid out five areas that would form the basis of the party's political manifesto: National Unity, Culture of Productivity, Family Life environment, Social Justice, and Fair Representation in Government Affairs. End Summary.

Background

¶2. Alternative, third political movements are not something new in Belize. In fact, between 1968 and 1971 there were the People's Action Committee (PAC), a political action group, and the United Black Association for Development (UBAD), a black power movement. Of the two, only UBAD ever contested local elections but was unsuccessful. Since then, there have been several others, the majority of which are now dissolved. The We the People Reform Movement, the National Reform Party (NRP), and the National Alliance for Belizean Rights (NABR) remain; the NABR is the only third party that has a long history of fielding candidates in local elections.

¶3. In 2005, the Vision Inspired by the People party was established and fielded candidates in only one municipality in the 2006 municipal elections. To the surprise of many, the VIP did extremely well for its rookie season, garnering 19.5 percent of the total votes cast. It is because of this strong showing, and voters' continued dissatisfaction with the two major political parties, that the VIP has decided to throw its hat in the ring for 2008 so early, launching its 2008 general election campaign at a press conference in Belize City on January 17. In his presentation, Party Chairman Paul Morgan outlined five central areas that form the basis of the party's political platform for the 2008 general elections.

The Five Core Areas

¶4. National Unity: The VIP states that it would promote national unity so that Belize's territorial integrity and the right of Belizeans to self determination are not compromised.

¶5. A Culture of Productivity: The VIP notes that it would develop a human capital strategy that would capitalize on the productive capacity of Belizeans living abroad so that Belize becomes more innovative and productive.

¶6. Family Life: The VIP states that in formulating the country's development policies, the party would ensure that Belizeans have the right to food, safety, healthcare, housing, and education. The party would also enact programs that would ensure that no child in Belize falls victim to parental misfortune, delinquency or abuse.

¶7. Social Justice: The VIP notes that it would ensure that Belizeans have equal rights and treatment in accessing national services and resources, and more importantly, that the poor of society be given priority in the distribution of the nation's wealth. In short, the VIP proposes to get rid of political victimization and patronage and implement election campaign finance reforms.

¶8. Fair Representation: The VIP states that it believes that elected officials must be accountable to the electorate or they lose their mandate. To achieve this goal, the VIP states that the current "first past the post" election system must be replaced by proportional representation and that Belizeans must be given the opportunity to vote directly on local and national issues by way of referendum and be able to recall elected leaders who have lost the public trust. The VIP also proposes to amend the Constitution to (1) give Belize an elected mixed member-proportional representation Senate with half the members elected at mid-term, (2) allow the Prime Minister to choose his Cabinet from the public at large, and (3) limit the size of the Cabinet to a maximum of nine ministers and place a consecutive two-term limit on the office of the Prime Minister. It also proposes to enforce UN and OAS anti-corruption conventions.

¶9. Comments: The results of the most recent polls reveal that 23 percent of Belizean voters are fed up with the two major political parties, and would consider an alternative, third party. The decision of the VIP to launch its 2008 general elections campaign this early is an indication that the party hopes to capitalize on voter disaffection with the main parties.

¶10. What the VIP ought to consider, though, is the sure-to-come scenario where more than one "third" party contests the 2008 general election, resulting in vote-splitting. Unless the third parties unite to oppose the two major parties, they will have little chance

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of winning the upcoming and tightly contested general election. At this point, our sense is that the prospects for third party unity are not strong, though Post understands that the National Reform Party (NRP) and the We the People Reform Movement have met to explore a consolidation. There is precedent for such alignments. The opposition United Democratic Party was formed as a result of the consolidation of the Liberal Party, the National Independent Party, and the Peoples' Democratic Movement. End comments.

DIETER